

[illegible]A vibrant collage of iconic horror movie characters. At the top, the title "DREAMING OF NIGHTMARES" is written in large, yellow, stylized letters. Below the title, a variety of characters are depicted: Dracula with his characteristic pale skin and fangs; Frankenstein's monster with his green, stitched skin; the Wolfman in his werewolf form; and many other recognizable figures from horror cinema. The background is a mix of dark and light colors, creating a dramatic effect. The overall theme is horror and the history of the genre.

A CRASH COURSE IN HORROR MOVIE HISTORY

# DREAMING OF NIGHTMARES

NIGE BURTON & JAMIE JONES

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**Inside front cover:** Boris Karloff as butler Morgan in *The Old Dark House* (Universal 1932). **Inside back cover:** Bela Lugosi is up to monkey business in *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (Universal 1932). **Back cover:** Original theatrical release poster for *Werewolf of London* (Universal 1935). **Right:** Fredric March, Rouben Mamoulian and Miriam Hopkins discuss *Dreaming of Nightmares* over a tea break while filming *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (Paramount 1931).

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ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT HORROR MOVIES IN ONE CONCISE VOLUME...

WELCOME TO DREAMING OF NIGHTMARES

OK, it might not be everything you need to know about horror movies, but the aim of this little publication is to give you a good basic history of the evolution of the horror film. We trace its earliest beginnings from the magic of Méliès, through the classic monsters of the 30s and 40s, via the outlandish bug-eyed 50s and gore-soaked gothic chic of Hammer Horror, to the modern icons who slashed the 20th century to its close.

We hope you find our potted history entertaining, informative and nostalgic. If you’ve enjoyed it, why not take a look at our other titles, all available in the Classic Monsters shop.

Have a monstrosly good time!

*Nige Burton*     *Jamie Jones*

Text: Nige Burton and Jamie Jones. Design: Greg White.



# 01 CHAPTER ONE

## SILENTSHUDDERS

### A MONSTROUS BEGINNING

The idea of the moving picture was still a fresh one when illusionist Georges Méliès opened the doors to his special-effects extravaganza *The Devil's Castle* (1896, released in the US as *The Haunted Castle*), wowing the viewing public with eerie apparitions and Mephistophelean metamorphoses.

His idea was a simple one - why bother using the Lumière brothers' pioneering invention to show people and places you could see anywhere, when the technology put limitless worlds of fantasy at your disposal?

With the genie well and truly out of the magic lantern, the fictional stories came thick and fast. Fittingly for a medium which to the uninitiated had a whiff of alchemy about it, the cinema screen quickly became home to films hinting at the darker side of imaginary life. Over in Japan, filmmakers explored their shadowy tendencies with shorts such as 1898's *Bake Jizo* and *Shinin no sosei*, and Méliès stuck to his occult guns with the likes of 1906's *The Merry Frolics of Satan*. Even his 1902 science-fiction adventure *A Trip to the Moon*, now a favourite of steampunk enthusiasts everywhere, sported aggressive lunar denizens in the shape of the insectile Selenites.

A now-lost 1908 Selig adaptation of Robert Louis Stevenson's novella *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* was possibly the first screen adaptation of one of horror culture's cornerstones. Shortly afterwards, Thomas Edison's 1910 version of *Frankenstein* amazed audiences with its special effects; the retelling took some liberties with Mary Shelley's original work, reducing the monster to an embodiment of Frankenstein's own unnatural thoughts, but this approach also conveniently allowed for some more technical wizardry, with the creature fading away before a mirror.

As with all art, it wasn't long before experimentation became the order of the day. Keen to see how far they could push this marvellous new technology, filmmakers devised increasingly bizarre settings as a convenient excuse to have some fun. When 1913's *Baloo the Demon Baboon* required its simian protagonist to walk across the ceiling, it was simply a case of dressing the room the wrong way up, rotating the camera



180 degrees and filming as normal. The result? An apparently very clever baboon, and a job well done.

The budding German expressionist movement and the apparently limitless potential of cinema were a match made in creative heaven. Movies like *The Cabinet of*



*Dr Caligari* (1919) neither wanted nor needed to be a slavish copy of the real world; these were glimpses into a deliberately stylised, nightmarish land, the workings of the camera reflecting those of the mind. Director Paul Leni toyed with genres, movies such as *The Cat and the Canary* (1927) blending recognised elements of comedy and horror with an expressionist style to remarkable effect. This fusion of the familiar and the fantastic enabled audiences to suspend their disbelief and immerse themselves in the action; a technique which endures to the present day in all kinds of media.

Plagiarism, too, quickly found its feet in the new medium. Prana's 1922 movie *Nosferatu* is held up today as a timelessly chilling work, the "Symphony of Shudders" its subtitle denoted, but it's also a shameless rip-off. The quality of F W Murnau's work was never in doubt - the issue lay with its "resemblance" to Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula*. Stoker's widow Florence took swift and decisive action to have all copies of the movie destroyed, but whether for good or ill, she wasn't entirely successful. A classic movie was retained; a crucial piece of intellectual property forever affronted.

Inevitably, the silent horror movie world had to have its stars. Rummage through the legions of greasepainted, intertitled heroes and heroines, and it isn't long before the name Lon Chaney does not merely appear, but staunchly refuses to go away. Necessity being the mother of invention (as he was born to deaf parents), Chaney had learned to express himself visually from an early age, and his formidable performance skills had already made him a



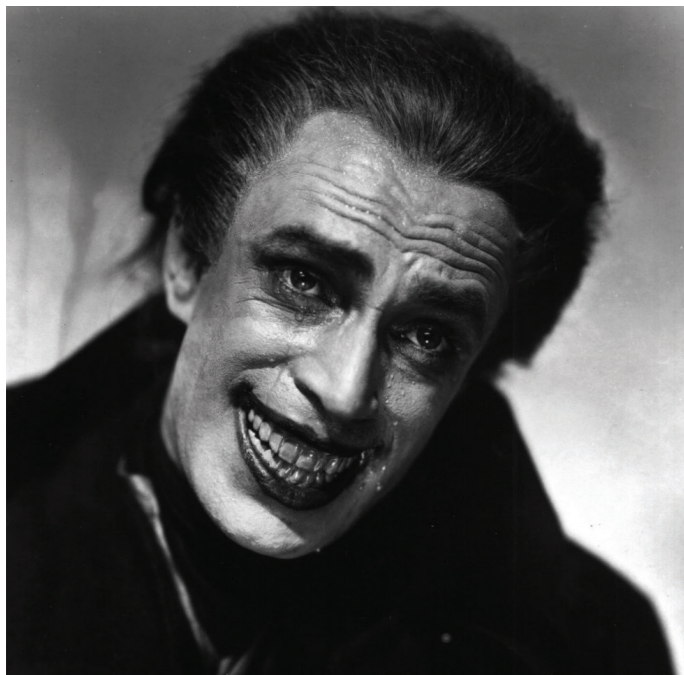
#### IMAGE CAPTIONS

**Opposite:** An original theatrical release poster for *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (Universal 1923). **Top, left:** Simple camera tricks create the impression of a ceiling walk in *Baloo the Demon Baboon* (Eclair 1913). **Top, right:** Charles Ogle as the Monster in *Frankenstein* (Edison 1910). **Above, left:** A hand-drawn poster in the silent era style for *The Cat and the Canary* (Universal 1927).



popular name on the theatre and vaudeville circuit. From there, it was only a short hop - via a scandalous suicide attempt by his wife Cleva - to the movie industry, where his appearance in 1919's *The Miracle Man* cemented his reputation as a first-rate character actor, winning him a contract with Universal after years as a struggling bit-player.

Again turning his previous experience to good account, but this time in the form of the make-up skills gleaned



from his stage work, Chaney was a good prospect for the Universal decision-makers at a time when actors still had some sway over how their characters looked. The fact that the movie industry was in its infancy did not diminish the scrutiny actors were under, and with CG post-production and re-touching not arriving anytime soon, it was a case of getting it right first time.

Chaney's fearless dedication to his craft took him into the horror genre with his striking portrayal of Quasimodo in 1923's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, Universal's most successful silent movie. From the bell tower of the cathedral, he plunged into the sewers below the Paris Opera House for *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925), unveiling his "living skull" design and shattering the world's preconceptions of what could be achieved. The masterpiece of character creation pulled no punches in its physical demands, with Chaney painting his eye sockets black and using wire hooks to pull his nose upwards until it bled.

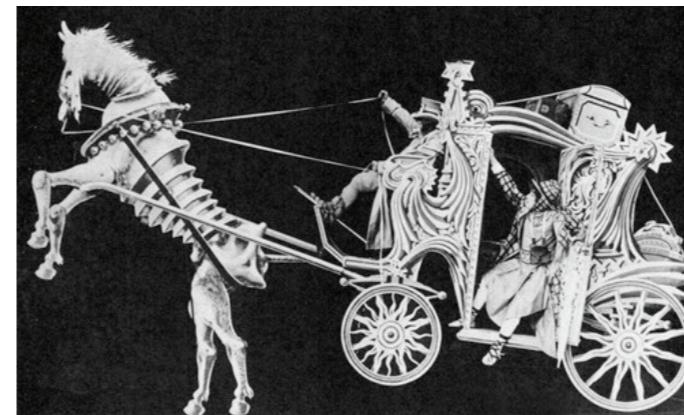
The very idea of horror movies was not so defined in cinema's early days, and genre pigeonholing into such specific areas as the modern era's found-footage-torture-body-horror-reboot had not taken hold. As such, the "horror" movies of the silent period had a far stronger dramatic element, trading as much on their emotional impact on audiences as on their out-and-out shock value. Stories were rooted in romance and suspense, with genuine horror moments relatively thin on the

ground. Even the more consistently eerie movies such as *Nosferatu* and *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* were designed to tug at the heartstrings as well as jangle the nerves.

Once more, Chaney's pantomime skills came to the fore here, allowing audiences to feel sympathy for his oftentimes macabre characters - in short, humanising the monstrous, whilst ensuring his reputation as the Man of a Thousand Faces remained uncompromised. Likewise, *The Man Who Laughs* (1928) presented Conrad Veidt's mutilated Gwynplaine not as a monster to be feared, but as a hero whose deformity gave audiences another reason to care about him.

As the 1930s approached, the cinema industry found its Next Big Thing, the advent of the talkies promising a synchronised multi-sensory spectacular for moviegoers. The move was a logical one - a richer experience = more patrons = bigger profits - and horror moviemakers were not behindhand in adopting the new technology. Many stars made the leap into the brave new world successfully; even Bela Lugosi, whose Hungarian accent had come in for its fair share of criticism, saw his performances in *The Thirteenth Chair* (1929) and *Dracula* (1931) released in silent and talkie versions.

However, it didn't always go so smoothly. Mary Philbin had turned in a memorable performance as the aghast, mask-ripping Christine in *The Phantom of the Opera* and perpetual sweetheart Dea in *The Man Who Laughs*, but her case was one of horses (albeit strikingly fresh-faced ones) for courses. When she and *Phantom* co-star Norman Kerry came to record the soundtrack for the 1930 sound release of *Phantom*, their inexperience in a sound recording



environment was laid bare. Many actors had never needed to act spoken dialogue, relying instead on expressions and gestures (what seems exaggerated today was a normal part of performance then); the new demands of intonation and timing were often at odds with the training and skills used by many. Amid the shouts of celebration at the dawn of the talkies, countless stars across Hollywood were rendered forever silent, their careers consigned to history.

With the era of silent film drawing to its inevitable close, the predictable backlash began. Silent movies were obsolete, its stars unconvincing. In the horror world, this manifested itself as a drive towards expressing the horrific in new ways, and finding new tales of terror with which to chill audiences. Movie monsters had been silent for too long; now, having found their voices, they would ensure that the screams never ceased.



#### IMAGE CAPTIONS

**Opposite, above:** An rare original poster for *Nosferatu* (Prana 1922). **Opposite, below:** Conrad Veidt has a fixed grin in *The Man Who Laughs* (Universal 1928). **Top, right:** Lon Chaney's superb make-up for *The Phantom of the Opera* (Universal 1925). **Above, left:** Devilish hi-jinx in Georges Méliès' *The Merry Frolics of Satan* (1906). **Above, right:** One of only two original poster designs for *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (Decla 1919).

# 02 CHAPTER TWO

## THE GOLDEN AGE THE HOLLYWOOD HORRORS THAT DEFINED A GENRE

**Karloff and Lugosi were the undoubted and supreme Universal monsters, although that yoke appellation, long-lived but brief in practice, should by rights have been the other way round; Lugosi, of course, came first.**

History often rewrites things with a romantic twist, and the accepted version of events places Lon Chaney dramatically dying from lung cancer in August 1930, thus precluding his appearance in Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931). That Chaney perished thus is without question, but he was never going to make *Dracula* even had he survived; the actor had just signed a three picture deal with MGM, and this alone would have prevented his accepting the role.



Director Browning had worked on Hamilton Deane's stage production of *Dracula* in 1927 and, when young Carl Laemmle Jr came to make his first horror picture after daddy handed him the keys to the lot for his twenty-first birthday, the

virtually unknown Bela was always Browning's first choice.

Two other Broadway migrants, Edward Van Sloan and Dwight Frye, also reprised their parts on celluloid, but it was Lugosi who stole both the show and a plethora of womanly hearts with his suave, hypnotic performance as the aristocratic, debonair Count. That he could barely speak English was of little importance at the time; *Dracula* was released as both a silent and a talkie and what lines he did utter were learned phonetically "like the words of a song", so what would later become the actor's curse, began as a wonderfully kitsch enhancement of the characterisation.

Released on St Valentine's Day in 1931, *Dracula* proved a bigger hit than even Junior Laemmle could have hoped for, and it allowed him to persuade Senior to indulge him with another horror film. For subject matter, he turned to the other British staple of gothic literature, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Using Peggy Webling's stage adaptation, French import Robert Florey shot a test with new superstar Lugosi, but the Golem-like make-up made the star look "like something out of *Babes in Toyland*" according to Van Sloan. The project was shelved and Lugosi was packed off with Florey to see what they could do with *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1932).

Lugosi's rejection of the role of the Monster is often cited as his fateful mistake, and one which allowed Karloff to have his big break; something which would apparently haunt the Hungarian for the rest of his chequered career. In reality, things again were quite different: both Lugosi and Florey were sacked from the picture, and couldn't have completed it had they wanted to, but the Hollywood version of events makes for a more dramatic history.

English talent was rife at Universal, and Brummie James Whale was as big a part of it as anyone else. Fresh from his critically acclaimed *Journey's End* (1930) and *Waterloo Bridge* (1931), the Dudley born director was given the pick of the



crop by young Carl. Whale, desperate to avoid being saddled with war films, chose *Frankenstein* from over 40 properties.

He cast his Monster after spotting Karloff in the commissary over lunch and, harnessing the genius of make-up supremo Jack P Pierce, created the image of Shelley's creature that would prevail for all time henceforth. Turning again to Webling's stage play, Whale commissioned finesse from John L Balderston and the resulting motion picture has become one of the most revered in the genre.

It seemed both Karloff and Lugosi's careers were set, but it was the quiet Englishman who would very soon take the lead. Lugosi's thick Eastern European accent would hold him back time and again, whereas Karloff would lisp through feature after feature with all alacrity, with nobody ever really seeming to notice or care.

*The Mummy* was his next big role, and although only a year after *Frankenstein*, it brought with it the accolade of Surname-only billing, something that had previously only been awarded to Garbo. Lugosi donned wig and eyebrows for *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, and even more hair and bigger eyebrows for *Island of Lost Souls* (1932). Both were great pictures, but neither managed the stature of his rival's Egyptian escapade, but there was promise on the horizon when the two stars were teamed by Universal, firstly in *The Black Cat* (1934), followed by *The Raven* (1935) and *The Invisible Ray* (1936).

The talent was equally matched, even if the billing wasn't, yet still Karloff soared ahead in terms of salary and exposure. Going solo, he took an outrageous turn in MGM's pre-code



*The Mask of Fu Manchu* (1932) and Universal's *The Old Dark House* (1932) before taking a working holiday in England so he could visit his estranged family. Karloff had feared they



### IMAGE CAPTIONS

**Opposite:** Professor Van Helsing (Edward Van Sloan) confronts Dracula (Bela Lugosi) with a mirror, in order to reveal his true identity, in *Dracula* (Universal 1931). **Top, left:** The Monster (Boris Karloff) sneaks up on an unsuspecting Elizabeth (Mae Clarke) in *Frankenstein* (Universal 1931). **Top, right:** A lobby card for *The Mummy* (Universal 1932). **Above, right:** Theatrical release poster for *The Invisible Man* (Universal 1933).



would resent him for his career choice and emigration, but he was wrong; his brothers welcomed him with open arms. Whilst on home turf, he teamed up with fellow Brits Ernest Thesiger and Cedric Hardwicke for Gaumont’s *The Ghoul* (1933), a low budget but rather pleasing romp about premature burial and eternal life. He would work with Thesiger again in Hollywood when he rugged up in bolts and callipers once more for his second turn as the Monster in 1935’s *Bride of Frankenstein*. With Whale back at the helm, the fun and the fear were heaped up in matched measure, although the ‘Bride’



was technically Valerie Hobson. Or Elsa Lanchester, depending on your viewpoint. It was certainly the latter according to Thesiger’s Dr Pretorius, as he proclaims ‘the Bride of Frankenstein’ against Franz Waxman’s score of wedding bells at the film’s finale. It was a worthy box office hit, although Whale’s talking Monster caused Karloff some consternation, the star believing that dialogue had detracted from the character’s uniqueness, and built up a level of sympathy for him which removed some of the terror. Fans disagree, and *Bride* is consistently noted as one of his finest films.

Lugosi did Dracula all over again, but this time as Count Mora in Tod Browning’s *Mark of the Vampire* (1935), a remake of that director’s 1927 Chaney vehicle, *London After Midnight*. The vampire might have been fake, but the leer and cadence were one hundred percent Bela, and the film turned MGM a tasty profit. Browning had finally been forgiven for *Freaks* (1932), in which he had told his tale of murder and intrigue among a circus troupe with a cast of genuine freaks and misfits, much to the chagrin of both public and censor; *Freaks* was banned for over thirty years.

Others too put in horror turns for Universal in the mid-thirties, with yet another English arrival in Hollywood showing - or rather, not showing - what he was made of. Claude Rains’ evil scientist Jack Griffin gave us thrills aplenty in James Whale’s *The Invisible Man* (1933). The studio’s first lollop into lycanthropy came in the guise of Henry Hull’s city-slick *Werewolf of London* (1935), but it would be another six years before they would give the legend its seminal cinematic treatment.

Although Universal ruled the Monster roost, the other studios were having a pretty good stab too. Over at Paramount, Fredric March was winning an Oscar with his chilling performance as the brutish Mr Hyde, terrorising vulnerable night-creature Miriam Hopkins in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1931).



RKO were no sluggards either, and in 1933 released the Eighth Wonder of the World on unsuspecting cinemagoers. The stop-frame wizardry of animator Willis O’Brien brought author Edgar Wallace’s giant ape to larger than life in *King Kong*, a film so successful that they did it all again later that year in *Son of Kong*, a sequel billed as ‘a serio-comic phantasy’.

Sequels would soon become all the rage and, after the success of *Bride of Frankenstein*, Universal were quickly at it again with their other main bankable monster, although the archdaemon



dismay, all scenes containing Dracula himself were excised before production began. The news wasn’t all bad though; the studio were still contractually obliged to pay him, and he pocketed a cool \$4,000 for merely appearing in a handful of publicity stills.

Directed by Lambert Hillyer, *Dracula’s Daughter* is a slick, dark thriller, infused with brooding, sexual undertones. Far ahead of its time both in production and realisation, not to mention performances, the film’s box office take was considerably lacklustre.

With MGM’s *Mad Love* (1935), a retelling of *The Hands of Orlac* with Peter Lorre and Colin Clive, and *The Devil Doll* (1936), which saw Lionel Barrymore harness his ‘little people’ in a tale of alchemy and revenge, the horror was largely over, at least for the moment. Censors were increasingly objecting to themes of a violent or gruesome nature, even though the movies had their own ‘H’ for Horrific certificate. The British Board of Film Censors’ Edward Shortt was particularly vocal: “although a separate category has been established for these films, I am sorry to learn they are on the increase. I hope that the producers and renters will accept this word of warning, and discourage this type of subject as far as possible.”

As the United Kingdom was an important market for Hollywood, this writing might just have well have been on the proverbial wall. American producers were intimidated by Shortt’s words and turned to other subjects.

It was the right true end of a very golden age of horror.



himself is absent save for a brief simmer on his funeral pyre organised by progeny Gloria Holden in *Dracula’s Daughter* (1936). A delighted Bela was meant to be back, but to his

#### IMAGE CAPTIONS

**Opposite, above left:** Fredric March won an Oscar for his performance as *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (Paramount 1931). **Opposite, above right:** Bela Lugosi is up to no good in *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (Universal 1932). **Opposite, below:** A colourful French poster for *King Kong* (RKO 1933). **Top, left:** Dr Pretorius (Ernest Thesiger) befriends the Monster (Boris Karloff) in *Bride of Frankenstein* (Universal 1935). **Top, right:** Otto Kruger presides over Gloria Holden’s untimely demise in *Dracula’s Daughter* (Universal 1936). **Above, left:** A poster for Poe-inspired Karloff and Lugosi classic *The Raven* (Universal 1935).

# 03

## CHAPTER THREE

# SECONDWIND

### THERE'S LIFE IN THEM MONSTERS YET!

The return of the horror had an unexpected catalyst. On the verge of bankruptcy, Los Angeles' Regina-Wilshire Theatre manager Emil Ulmann booked a four-day run of Universal's original 1931 *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* films and showed them in a triple feature along with RKO's 1933 *Son of Kong* in August, 1938.

The public went wild and queued for up to 21 hours a day in police-controlled lines running around the block, while the little theatre struggled to put in enough extra performances to meet demand. Ulmann had rented the prints off Universal at a flat rate and, while he cleaned up enough to stave off his impending financial straits, the powers that be at studio level were seeing no share in the profits.

In one of life's peculiar and often poignant little paradoxes, Bela Lugosi had been out of film work for two years, and was becoming the archetypal starving actor. When the mortgage company foreclosed, he was forced to move out of his beloved mansion at 2227 Outpost Drive, and had even had to apply to the Motion Picture Relief Fund for help with hospital fees when his son had been born in January 1938. In a microcosmic parallel Universe, the twain came together in curious concert for once; Ulmann hired the out of work actor to make nightly public appearances at his theatres.

Universal were at once infuriated and elated. Setting things right for themselves, they quickly struck 500 new prints of both *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, and started aggressively marketing the double-bill throughout the country. The results were as staggering as they had been at the Regina; Ulmann had unwittingly stumbled upon an audience that had heard of these films but never seen them. Lugosi was suddenly in demand again, and headed off on a tour of West Coast cinemas to promote the fare with all alacrity. The star took the money, the studio took the credit and poor Ulmann's prints were pulled from him post haste after the most incredible four weeks he had ever had. And this time Universal didn't make the same mistake; they took their share of the profits from all other rentals. But a humble Bela was ever-grateful: "I owe it all to that little man at the Regina Theatre. I was dead, and he brought me back to life."

All it had taken in the end was the whiff of the dollars, and the self-imposed prohibition was over. Universal



rushed *Son of Frankenstein* (1939) into production, and the other studios soon followed suit. Boris and Bela were back too, in what would be their finest pairing, but it did mark the end of Karloff's appearances as the Monster; he turned fifty-one whilst making the picture and declared enough was enough - the eighteen pound boots could henceforth go to other ministers of fear. Another English star, Basil Rathbone, took on the title role.

*Son of Frankenstein*'s extravagant budget paid off - the monsters were well and truly back, if not quite so venerated as before, and the public were happy; nobody had hitherto realised just how much they had missed them.

The gruesome grindstone was turning once again, and saw Universal redouble their efforts; public demand had seen the monsters sensationally recalled to life, and what the

public wants, the public gets, especially when the promised bucks are so big. The studio again teamed Karloff, firstly with Rathbone for historical melodrama *Tower of London* (1939), and then Lugosi for *Black Friday* (1940), but the rot had an early set-in this time; Karloff dominated the action and the screen while poor Bela, despite a sparkling performance, was reduced to mere minutes in front of the camera.

Later the same year, Universal resurrected another old favourite in the form of Vincent Price for *The Invisible Man Returns* (1940), before raiding the annals once more to dig up the Mummy. No sequel this time though, but a curious remake in the form of *The Mummy's Hand* (1940), which saw former Western star Tom Tyler don the yards of gauze and bandages as Kharis, a prodigy presided over by High Priest George Zucco. But it was the following year before something really monstrous would happen.

1941 marked the tenth anniversary of Universal's having become Hollywood's major monster maker, and it was a birthday they wanted to celebrate in style. With budget and grandeur heaped on it in abundance, *The Wolf Man* became their shiny, new, yak-hair-covered monster, with, of course, more than a little help from make-up maestro Jack Pierce. Screenwriter Curt Siodmak invented a whole new folklore legend in the shifting shape of luckless lycanthrope Larry Talbot. Promoted from his modest success in *Man Made Monster* a few months earlier, Lon Chaney Jr was cast in the title role, opposite such heavyweights as Claude Rains, Maria Ouspenskaya and Ralph Bellamy. Universal not only had their new monster, but also their new star: from this picture onwards, Chaney



#### IMAGE CAPTIONS

**Opposite:** Universal's press advertising for the re-release of *Dracula* (1931) and *Frankenstein* (1931) as a double-bill in 1938. **Top, left:** Crowds queued for hours to get in to see the outrageously popular monster pairing. **Above:** Posters for (left) *Son of Frankenstein* (Universal 1939) and (right) *Man Made Monster* (Universal 1941).



dropped the Jr; history really was repeating itself.

The success of *The Wolf Man* sent Universal spinning into orbit, and the monster machine was ramped up at a rate quite alarming. With mad doctors and spooky islands occupying the slack months, the studio commissioned new scripts for their old faithfuls at a rate of knots, and naturally the following year saw the new Chaney walking in familiar shoes. *The Ghost of Frankenstein* (1942) saw the Monster in his fourth outing, though while successful, Lon was no Boris. Gone was the pathos in favour of brutish thuggery in what was arguably the character at its most frightening. As the money kept rolling in the features kept rolling out, but the quality began to suffer. Made now as much for the Saturday juvenile audience as anyone, the stakes got ever higher as the inevitable happened: if one monster equated to box office success, why not have two?

*Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* (1943) was the first clash of the titans, but there was a problem: Lon Chaney had played both characters in their previous movies. The actor wasn't about to let anyone else play the Wolf Man - his baby - and expensive double exposure effects were out of the question. The answer was logical on paper if not in execution. As Bela Lugosi's character of Ygor had his brain transplanted

into the Monster at the end of *The Ghost of Frankenstein*, it made perfect sense - or seemed to - for Lugosi to finally take on the role himself. A sort of 'coming full circle' affair.

The star's age and infirmity, last minute production changes, and edits to what was already a slightly lumpy, lollopy script made the Monster look a little ridiculous. Hollywood's version of history and that old military stalwart General Opinion would have things worse than they were though; when one understands the idiosyncrasies of the shot film, it is much easier to sympathise with Lugosi's in-the-main fine performance, and - despite its shortcomings - *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* is a wonderful movie.

But Universal weren't going to get it all their own way. Over at RKO, studio heads drafted in Yalta born Vladimir Ivanovich Leventon to create a unit specially dedicated to 'B' horror pictures. Known to us as Val Lewton, the modest producer was about to turn the world of horror right on its horn-bedecked head. Whereas Universal threw their monsters in audiences' faces, Lewton made a policy decision to keep his shocks subtle. This wasn't at all what RKO had planned; they wanted their creatures as big and bold as anything the rivals were churning out, but ludicrously small budgets and outlandish titles made the task nigh on impossible. In less skilled hands, papier mâché and poster paint may have been the order of the day, but Lewton used what money there was wisely. His horror was psychological and implied, playing on that most potent of foes, the fear within. One can only imagine what hideous legacy classics like *Cat People* (1942), *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943) and *The Leopard Man* (1943) may have left the studio were it not for his genius.

Such was the success of these brooding, dark thrillers that RKO won the lottery soon afterwards and got Karloff himself. The star's initial misgivings were unfounded, and Lewton handled him with sensitivity and respect, producing such timeless vehicles as *The Body Snatcher*



(1945) which also saw the return of Lugosi in the pair's final film together, *Isle of the Dead* (1945) and *Bedlam* (1946). Fed up with playing mad scientists, and the clichéd scripts he was usually offered, Karloff later said of Lewton: "he was the man who rescued me from the living dead and restored, so to speak, my soul."

Back at Universal, it was a case of the more monsters the merrier. Having singled out the Mummy for an inexplicably lonesome path, they gave him to Lon Chaney for *The Mummy's Tomb* (1942), *The Mummy's Ghost* (1944) and *The Mummy's Curse* (1944), while meanwhile, his stablemates were planning a party. *House of Frankenstein* (1944) not only had Dracula, the Wolf Man and the Frankenstein Monster, but Boris Karloff too, as mad Dr Niemann. A similar mash-up the following year came in the guise of *House of Dracula*, but this time Onslow Stevens took up the scalpel as the deliciously twisty, Jekyll-and-Hyde-esque Dr Franz Edelmann. But all good things must come to an end.

#### IMAGE CAPTIONS

**Opposite, top left:** A Realart re-release poster for *House of Frankenstein* (Universal 1944). **Opposite, below:** Simone Simon visits the zoo in *Cat People* (RKO 1942). **Top, left:** Chaney was the second person to play the Monster in Universal's saga, for *The Ghost of Frankenstein* (Universal 1942). **Top, right:** Vincent Price becomes the unseen one in *The Invisible Man Returns* (Universal 1940). **Above, right:** Lon Chaney Jr in Jack Pierce's superlative make-up for *The Wolf Man* (Universal 1941). **Right:** Lon Chaney Jr as Kharis in *The Mummy's Tomb* (Universal 1942).



By the late 1940s in Hollywood, a meeting with Abbott and Costello was almost as inevitable as a date with the Grim Reaper himself and, by turns, each monster duly complied. Slick and funny as these romps were, in their wake there was nowhere left to go; this time it really was over.

In time, the monsters would resurface again, but it would be in different colours, and in a different land.



# 04

## CHAPTER FOUR

# OUT OF THIS WORLD

### VISIONS OF A DARKER FUTURE

In principle, science fiction has been in existence for hundreds of years, and although heading too far back into cultural history tends to blur the line between science, religion and folklore, the core tenets remain consistent. Stories such as Johannes Kepler's Latin-written 1608 novel *Somnium* - hailed by the likes of Isaac Asimov as the first true work of science fiction - had played with the idea of things from outside our normal sphere of reference (in this case, a young boy flying to the moon with daemons summoned by his mother) and the use of the imagination in telling stories is as old as storytelling itself.



The development of the genres of horror and science fiction perhaps made it inevitable that they would intertwine. Both genres dealt with the unknown, the one using it to scare us, the other to inspire us. Novels such as Mary Shelley's 1818 creation *Frankenstein* had used the written word to tell of things that at first seemed incredible - but *might just* be possible; and wherever literature goes, cinema usually follows with its own particular gusto.

While horror movies enjoyed a golden age in the 1930s, exploring the familiar monsters of folklore and creating a few new ones along the way, science fiction culture enjoyed a parallel halcyon period throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Concepts such as Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics shaped our understanding of what science fiction could offer, establishing ideas that remain at the heart of the genre. As western society emerged warily from the shadow of World War II, looking cautiously towards the future but mindful of its recent ordeal, the conditions were right for the birth of something new. In fact and fiction alike, horror and science collided; and filmmakers lost no time in combining these fears, hopes and dreams, and transferring them to the big screen.

With the age of the mass market underway, and space travel firing the collective imagination, there was a sense of hope in the air. Fuelled by the popularity of science fiction comic books aimed at the burgeoning teenage market, screenwriters and filmmakers rushed to embrace the concepts of alien worlds, as-yet-unknown scientific discoveries, and extraterrestrial life. Naturally, this wasn't just about hollow displays of a utopian future; there were stories to be told.

The arrival of Klaatu's archetypal flying saucer in 1951's *The Day the Earth Stood Still* was a curiously subdued beginning to the sci-fi horror age, as though the genre were taking baby steps along the road to



atomic-age terror. The über-minimal design of the craft didn't exactly herald death from the skies; this was instead a cautionary tale offering a commentary on the accelerating pace of real-world scientific progress, and a word or two of quiet warning. Klaatu's otherworldly abilities and message from a higher power gave him Christ-like qualities, with mankind cast as the aggressors unwilling to heed the wisdom brought to them.

The vision of the future presented in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* was shiny and sleek, a look characteristic of the aesthetics of the entire genre. Futuristic technology wouldn't need the crassly functional look of real-world devices - Bakelite was out, replaced with flashing lights and the bare minimum of buttons to press. With no workings on show, the world of science fiction was both full of implied possibilities for the audience, and a boon for set designers. It also served to underline the inherent strangeness of the aliens we were about to meet.

*The Thing from Another World* (1951) played its part in bringing the horror of alien worlds to life, but in an altogether less pleasant way. With its shiny flying saucer destroyed, the shape-shifting alien monster could get down to business, the allure of new technology replaced with visceral, claustrophobic horror. *The Day the Earth Stood Still* had delivered a warning about the repercussions of irresponsible scientific meddling; *The Thing from Another World* spelled it out.

Just as the golden age of Lugosi's *Dracula* and Karloff's *Frankenstein Monster* had done, the science fiction horror



heyday would produce its own icons. In this respect 1954's *Creature from the Black Lagoon* hit the jackpot, with an amphibious antagonist that made a kind of physical sense, rooted in normal Earth principles of evolution. It hadn't fallen from the sky in a meteor or travelled in a spaceship; it was already here, in the relatively normal surroundings of an Amazonian lagoon, and its eerie underwater ballet reminded cinemagoers that whatever



#### IMAGE CAPTIONS

**Opposite:** James Arness is *The Thing from Another World* (RKO 1951). **Top, left:** Rex Reason and Faith Domergue battle the Metaluna Mutant, and **(top, right)** an original theatrical release poster for *This Island Earth* (Universal 1955). **Above, right:** Colourful poster art for *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (Universal 1954).



new horizons might be awaiting discovery in space, the Earth itself still had plenty of terrifying secrets to reveal.

Pulp sci-fi comics and novels had already treated audiences to glimpses of alien life, but 1955's *This Island Earth* helped to crystallise pop culture's idea of what an alien monster should look like, creating another enduring icon of sci-fi horror. The Metaluna Mutant was a veritable checklist of scary sci-fi parts. Bug eyes? Check. Lethal pincers? Check. Vaguely unsettling exposed brain? Check and check again, for the sheer size of the thing. Science fiction horror could bring us scares in any shape, but the Metaluna Mutant seemed like the textbook alien monster.

The American movie industry wasn't the only one frightening audiences with tales of scientifically-gearred horror. Japan's Toho studio made their own mountain-sized contribution to the roster of sci-fi horror stars when their nuclear weapons allegory *Gojira* took form in 1954, later to be named *Godzilla* in the Americanised 1956 release. The city-levelling saurian (not to mention the relentless Hiroshima-style damage he wrought on Tokyo) was a clear embodiment of Japan's fears of the atomic age.

Like the Creature from the Black Lagoon, *Godzilla* wasn't a recognisable Earth creature, but plenty of sci-fi horror stars were. 1954's *Them!* continued the theme of radiation damage, with ants so large that all the Women's Institute tea urns in the world couldn't produce enough boiling water to get rid of them. Similarly, 1955's *Tarantula* was the product of science gone wrong, with a nutritional supplement having unexpected side-effects. Using



giant bugs as their monsters enabled filmmakers to tap into the audience's inherent bug-phobia: a spider in the bath is bad enough, but a giant one ripping the side off your apartment is quite another proposition.

While cinematic special effects were becoming ever more advanced, budgetary considerations often made for more home-grown methods. Filmmaker Edward D Wood Jr had cut his teeth on exploitation movies and brought a uniquely low-budget flavour to the world of science fiction; big on vision but short on cash, he refused to let his budgetary restrictions rein in his cinematic ambitions.

His work was the celluloid equivalent of throwing paint at a wall to see what stuck, and was often just as messy, with *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (made in 1956, released theatrically in 1959) often cited as the worst movie ever made. Wood was determined to make his scanty resources go as far as possible, taking effects-heavy plotlines that would ordinarily be accompanied by hefty budgets, and realising them on a shoestring. Ridiculed at the time, his movies would be embraced years later precisely because of their remarkably poor quality, and the director himself - living proof of the adage that God loves a trier - would become an ironic icon of the age.

Another of the key personalities of the sci-fi horror era came in the larger-than-life shape of Allied Artists director William Castle, whose approach to movies at the end of the 1950s broke the fourth wall and brought the action off the screen, right into the theatre auditorium. The movies themselves may not have been traditional sci-fi, but Castle's gimmickry and gadgetry certainly pushed the cinema experience into new territory.

*House on Haunted Hill* (1959) and *The Tingler* (1959) each had two coups for the price of one. While the former used the Emergo feature to propel a red-eyed skeleton over the audience at a key moment, the latter's Percepto made seats vibrate in sync with the on-screen action. Both enjoyed the



presence of one of the most iconic monster movie stars of the day, Vincent Price, whose charmingly sinister presence had already made him a horror A-lister throughout the 1940s. His imposing stature and booming yet insinuating vocal talents added gravitas to sci-fi horror movies including *House of Wax* (1953), *The Fly* (1958) and its sequel, *Return of the Fly* (1959).

Yet all things must change. The market for "normal" science fiction shrank considerably throughout the 1950s, with the 1954 introduction of the Comics Code intended to clean up the industry and thereby save the world from the scourge of juvenile delinquency. The severity of the rules (including the forced removal of the words "horror"

or "terror" in comic titles) neutered the entire industry, strangling creative freedom and forcing many comics out of business. This contraction in the science fiction comic market reduced the genre's visibility in wider culture; eager for something new, filmmakers docked their spaceships, hung up their ray guns, and headed off for pastures new.

The golden age of science fiction horror had passed, but as with all cultural trends, the history books would provide a new perspective. This period would be recorded as one of bold filmmaking, massive progress in special effects technology, and a particular aesthetic that even today remains both credible and compelling.



#### IMAGE CAPTIONS

**Opposite, above left:** Vincent Price struggles to swat Brett Halsey in *Return of the Fly* (20th Century Fox 1959). **Opposite, above right:** Original theatrical release poster for *Them!* (Warner Brothers 1954). **Top:** The giant lizard remains cool under fire in *Godzilla* (Toho 1954). **Above, left:** Furry but not cuddly; the arachnid of *Tarantula* (Universal-International 1955). **Above, right:** Tor Johnson menaces Mona McKinnon in *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (DCA 1959).

# 05 CHAPTER FIVE

# NEWBLOOD

## THE RISE OF THE BRITISH MONSTERS

Hammer Films' unpretentious beginnings had been inspired by entrepreneur William Hinds, better known under his vaudeville stage name of Will Hammer. With his fledgling little company, Exclusive Films, he quickly established a niche producing the pre-war 'quota quickie', but couldn't have known that he had also unwittingly established the future of the horror movie, and created an indelible place in that world for his son, Anthony.



In was in the mid 1950s that the studio, still trading as Exclusive, would make what turned out to be one of their most momentous decisions: to produce a film based on the BBC television adaptation of Nigel Kneale's *The Quatermass Experiment*. Initially unsure, Auntie eventually

accepted a £500 advance for the property and, dropping the 'E' for dramatic effect, the studio released *The Quatermass Xperiment* in 1954, taking the unusual step of actively pursuing an 'adults only' X-certificate from the censor.

Critics scathed all over it, and the film all but destroyed the reputation of Exclusive. The viewing public, however, thought differently; the bawdy realism and shocking storyline had them queueing for more, and *X the Unknown* (1956) and *Quatermass 2* (1956) followed hot on its heels.

Sir James Carreras had joined Exclusive as a young man, his father Enrique having been the company's co-founder alongside Hammer. Determined to turn around the tiny studio's fortunes, the young entrepreneur was on the hunt for something special.

Ironically, the first draft of the film that would change everything was written by an American. And not just any American at that. Milton Subotsky had formed a partnership with Max J Rosenberg to produce educational films for television in 1954, but a couple of years later Subotsky went solo, adapting Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein* into a treatment.

Subotsky submitted the piece to financier Eliot Hyman of New York based Associated Artists Productions, who in turn sent it to his Variety Club pal Carreras. Initially excited by the property, Carreras registered the title and plans were put in motion to engage an ageing Boris Karloff to star in what would be a cheaply made black and white feature. But the registration alerted Universal, who promptly issued Exclusive with a swift legal warning, threatening a hefty lawsuit if they so much as hinted at anything which they considered their intellectual property, in particular Jack Pierce's iconic and copyrighted make-up for the Monster. Dismayed but not discouraged, Carreras met both Subotsky and Rosenberg in May, 1956, but still believing



it would be too expensive to make, Carreras chose to use only the merest outline of their story, settling a one-off payment and small percentage of Hyman's profit share on the partnership. Subotsky would never quite get over his lack of a credit on the eventual movie and, with Rosenberg, would go on to set up Amicus, Hammer's main competitor throughout the 1960s and 70s.

Carreras asked Anthony Hinds and Jimmy Sangster to rewrite the script, and Exclusive regular Terence Fisher was drafted in to direct, with little known British actor Peter Cushing being cast as *Frankenstein*.

Keen to steer clear of trouble, Exclusive were careful that Phil Leakey's make-up should look nothing like Universal's, and they even called the Monster the 'Creature'. *Carry On* regular Bernard Bresslaw was briefly considered for the role, but it eventually went to the unknown Christopher Lee, merely because he had the required stature and some knowledge of mime.

Filming of *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957) began behind schedule, but Hyman recognised the picture's potential early doors and managed to secure more backing. Thus, the eventual production sprang magnificently from its meagre monochrome roots, and blossomed into a glorious but inexpensive Eastmancolour production.

The film was released under the Hammer banner, and in so doing, Carreras created a new phenomenon more powerful than any creature created by the film's protagonist. Reportedly taking over seventy times its



production cost, *Curse* played to packed houses on both sides of the Atlantic, and it marked the beginning of a whole new era of gothic horror films. But where Universal had quickly cut away from the merest hint of blood, Hammer cut in for a lingering, visceral close-up in full colour.

Riding high, Carreras and the team turned to the other natural nineteenth century gothic horror novel, and quickly put *Dracula* into production the same year. Elevated to overnight superstardom in the mould of Karloff and



### IMAGE CAPTIONS

**Opposite:** Richard Wordsworth changes for the worse in *The Quatermass Xperiment* (Hammer 1955). **Top, left:** For copyright reasons, in the US *Dracula* had to be released as *Horror of Dracula* (Hammer 1958). **Top, right:** Christopher Lee's more urbane Count in *Dracula* (Hammer 1958). **Above, right:** Phil Leakey applies mortician's wax, rubber and cotton wool to Christopher Lee for *The Curse of Frankenstein* (Hammer 1957).

Lugosi, Lee and Cushing would take the leads. In the September of 1957, the studio entered into a worldwide distribution deal with Columbia, and this would prove to be the most important co-partnership in their history.

With *Dracula*, Hammer added that final element which would make their remarkable formula complete; Christopher Lee was cast as a more threateningly schizophrenic Count; sophisticated aristocrat on one side, and ruthless sexual predator on the other. Cushing was dashing as a dynamic Van Helsing, and the two in concert struck a perfect chord in what many critics view as Hammer’s greatest film.

Some of the more puritanical press camps were outraged: The Daily Telegraph claimed that the X-certificate was “too good” for *Dracula*, and that “there should be a new certificate - ‘S’ for sadistic or just ‘D’ for disgusting.” Such prim views seem so utterly absurd in today’s desensitised environment, but even the audiences of the time disagreed and voted with their feet and their cash; *Dracula* was huge.

The Americans were excited too, and demanded more. The Columbia deal had contracted three pictures, but it was the third of these that really made them giddy; it was to be a sequel to *The Curse of Frankenstein*.

Despite the most disparaging critical reviews, *The Revenge of Frankenstein* (1958) delighted audiences in both Britain and the US, and to this day remains one of the finest examples of Hammer’s craftsmanship. Made by pretty much the same team as *The Curse of Frankenstein*, it is without doubt one of those rarest of cinematic occasions when a sequel is actually superior to the original.

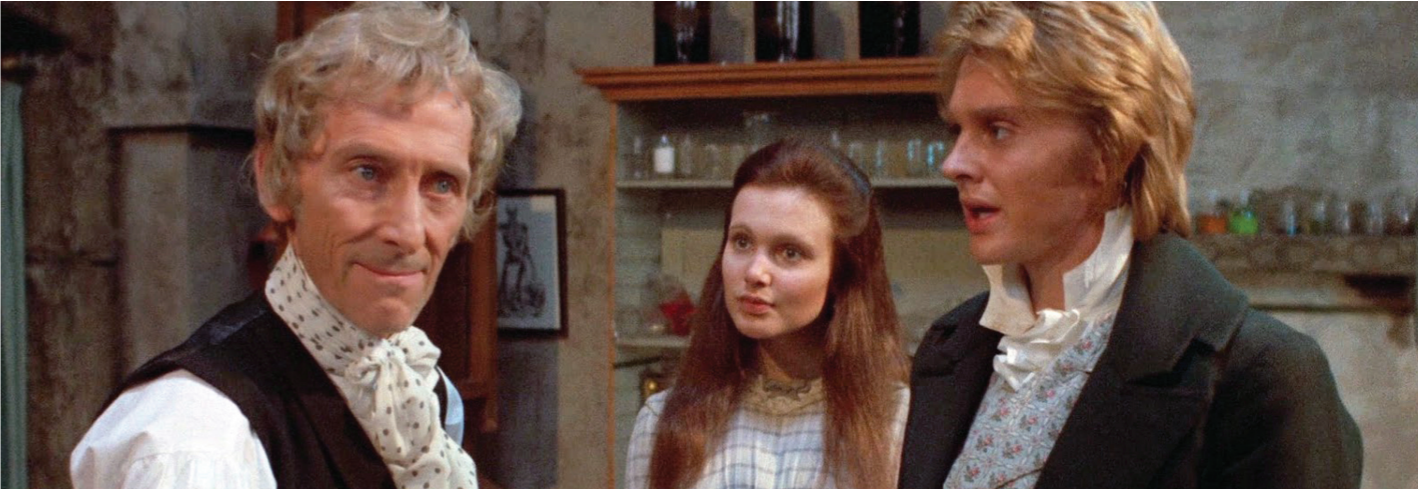
The gothic horror gravy-train was off and, in turn, Hammer would give their modern treatment to all the classics. 1959 saw the lavish production of *The Mummy*, which again



teamed Cushing and Lee, while 1960 saw the studio’s compelling take on another literary classic, this time Robert Louis Stevenson’s Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. Told with license and liberality, *The Two Faces of Dr Jekyll* moved Lee pleasantly sideways, allowing him to turn in an exquisite performance as deliciously depraved Paul Allen, with the dual title monster role going to Paul Massie.

A sort of sequel to *Dracula*, 1960’s *The Brides of Dracula* saw the return of Cushing as Van Helsing, more athletic than ever. In Lee’s absence, pretty David Peel took on the role of Baron Meinster and gave the world a new type of heartthrob vampire in this finely crafted romp. Cast as a young pin-up, Peel was actually a youthful 40 year old.

By the time of *The Curse of the Werewolf* (1961), Hammer eschewed both of their established stars and gave the title role to a young Oliver Reed, basing their screenplay on Guy Endore’s novella Werewolf of Paris, but shifting



the action to Spain. Similarly, the lead in 1962’s *The Phantom of the Opera* went to Czech born Herbert Lom, and once again the story was transplanted to a new locale, this time London standing in for Paris.

More sequels followed in the ever-popular Frankenstein and Dracula franchises, with Cushing playing the Baron a further four times, and Lee the Count another six, with a particular Hammer highlight coming during the making of *Dracula Has Risen From the Grave* in 1968. The studio’s coveted Queen’s Award to Industry sent them screaming all the way to the bank.

But the tide was beginning to turn, and the popularity of horror films was once more on the wane. By 1970, an increasingly disillusioned Hammer decided to go back to the beginning. For *The Horror of Frankenstein* Cushing was now deemed too old to play the Baron, and new Hammer favourite Ralph Bates was drafted in to play the role of the ruthless reanimator, with David

Prowse as his thuggish creation. Critically, it bombed.

The fun was nearly over. Protracted acrimony between the now Sir James Carreras and his son Michael culminated in a share sale from father to son, with the elder departing Hammer in 1972. The younger, it would seem, had taken over as the company sailed its most stormy waters. In an era where bare breasts or contemporary settings abounded, the studio’s seventh and final foray into the world of Baron Frankenstein is a curious anomaly, but provides a strangely poetic denouement to what had been the brave new world of horror.

*Frankenstein and the Monster from Hell* had Cushing once again back as the Baron, but in the interim he had been bent to the point of breaking. The actor had lost his beloved wife, actress Violet Helene Beck, on the 14th of January, 1971, and had announced to the press that he now simply wished to die so that he could join her.

A sympathetic Terence Fisher was back in the director’s chair, and the role of the Monster went once again to David Prowse in what turned out to be a sombre, moody film in the truest traditions of the glory days of Hammer Horror. But the film proved to be an ending in so many ways. Not released until 1974, it was Cushing’s last turn as his beloved Baron, and the final milestone in the career of the studio’s greatest director.

Haunting and melancholy, *Frankenstein and the Monster from Hell* provides a perfect closing chapter, and remains a sad swan song to an era of British cinema that had been truly great, but would very soon be gone forever.

IMAGE CAPTIONS

**Opposite, top:** Oliver Reed turns hirsute for *The Curse of the Werewolf* (Hammer 1961). **Opposite, below left:** Original theatrical release poster for *The Mummy* (Hammer 1959). **Opposite, below right:** A lobby card featuring David Peel in *The Brides of Dracula* (Hammer 1960). **Top:** Peter Cushing, Madeline Smith and Shane Briant contemplate proceedings in *Frankenstein and the Monster from Hell* (Hammer 1974). **Above:** A favourite among Hammer’s bevy of beauties - Veronica Carlson in *Dracula Has Risen From the Grave* (Hammer 1968).

# 06 CHAPTER SIX

## SLASHERSUBURBIA

### WHEN HORROR CINEMA HIT HOME

As the gothic excesses of Hammer faded, the horror movie industry was left without a particular trend to attach a convenient label to. It wasn't long, though, before the cycle began anew, and this period of horror filmmaking brought the focus closer to home.

The gothic locations and period dress of Hammer's movies had placed horror in a different world, with settings and characters harking back to the dark fairytales of Universal. Now, with cinematic techniques becoming ever more refined, filmmakers were able to create an atmosphere of horror in the most mundane of settings. The age of home-based horror, and in particular the slasher movie, had begun.

The fundamental rules for the genre had established themselves years earlier. 1960's *Psycho*, often named as



the first slasher movie, set its horror in an unassuming motel. Its insane protagonist usually wore normal clothes and - at least initially - did a fairly convincing impersonation of a normal human being. Even at this early stage, the slasher genre told us loud and clear: this kind of horror emerges where you'd least expect

it. *Psycho*'s horror is remarkably pared-back, although director Alfred Hitchcock's masterful use of suspense means that when the horror hits, it hits hard.

As the 1970s dawned, they brought in an approach to horror which was often far less subtle than the brooding tension of the likes of *Psycho*. For many filmmakers, inspiration came from overseas: the Italian *giallo* movement combined the worlds of murder-mystery, horror and crime fiction, with a supernatural element adding extra spice. Directors such as Mario Bava, Dario Argento and Lucio Fulci used strong cinematography and unconventional camera angles to create the unsettling atmosphere which framed their scenes of lurid violence.

William Friedkin's 1973 classic *The Exorcist* used a comfortable domestic setting as the basis for unforgettable horror, this time with a marked spiritual focus; rather than



spraying blood and gore everywhere, the movie relied on the soul-chilling horror of a twelve-year-old girl being possessed by a demon. The image of Regan MacNeil's head revolving has been parodied to the extent that its horror could be expected to have diminished by now; however, the scene has in fact lost none of its impact, and *The*



*Exorcist* remains a harrowing experience for horror fans.

A few years later, 1976's *The Omen* turned religious horror into a killing spree, whilst retaining the "creepy kid" motif also found in *The Exorcist*. Here, the evil presence still looked harmless, with little sweetheart Damien Thorn leaving the killing to his new nanny Mrs Baylock and a set of convenient accidents. The horror was more violent, and audiences were less likely to relate to the Italian cemeteries and expansive embassy sets than they were to *The Exorcist*'s suburban house, but *The Omen* elicited many of the same reactions. How close could evil get, before you noticed it?

As is always the case, many filmmakers took inspiration from real-world events, and the results became notorious in their own right. The story of serial killer Ed Gein was used by director Tobe Hooper as the basis for the cannibalistic Sawyer family in 1974's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, and his fictional story introduced one of the poster boys of the slasher era, the deranged mask-maker Leatherface. The idea of a killer with a recognisable silhouette and trademark weapon had been seen in many previous movies, but came into its own in the world of slasher horror.

The same year saw the release of *Black Christmas*. With its college sorority house setting and cast of vulnerable teens meeting various unpleasant ends, it seems in retrospect like a template for many of the slasher pictures that followed. Screenwriter A Roy Moore reportedly based the script on a series of murders in Montreal, but the story of *Black Christmas* also shared several elements with the urban legend of the babysitter and the man upstairs.



From the crumbling farmhouses of Hooper's Texas, and the mutilated festivities of *Black Christmas*, horror would come to wear an even more ordinary



#### IMAGE CAPTIONS

**Opposite, left:** All appears normal between Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) and Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (Paramount 1960). **Opposite, right:** Original theatrical release poster for *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Bryanston 1974). **Top, left:** Pamela Voorhees (Betsy Palmer) on the rampage in *Friday the 13th* (Paramount 1980). **Top, right:** Robert Englund as Freddy Krueger in *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (New Line 1984). **Above, right:** Poster art for *The Omen* (20th Century Fox 1976).



appearance. 1978's *Halloween* placed the horror on the most ordinary of suburban streets, with masked killer Michael Myers even appearing in broad daylight as he stalks Laurie Strode and her ill-fated friends.

By setting the action at a time when children roam the streets a little more freely, director John Carpenter and producer Debra Hill made the movie's nightmarish events all the more frightening: with established figures of authority either unwilling or unable to help, and locking the doors ineffectual, the killer could quite literally be anywhere.

This sense of vulnerability headed to the great outdoors in 1980's *Friday the 13th*, launching another of slasher horror's most recognised franchises. Although Jason Voorhees did not appear in earnest until the sequel, and did not don his hockey mask until the third movie in the series, his relentless killing sprees and near-immortality have made him a slasher celebrity. Later instalments attempted to introduce new ideas such as psychic powers and mystical daggers, but these weaker additions to Jason's story fell by the wayside and the story always returns, in one form or another, to the machete-wielding psychopath doing what he does best.

By 1984, it was Wes Craven's turn to create his own horror icon. Needing a masked antagonist who could still speak clearly, he designed a monster whose mask came in the form of burn scars; the monster's name was Freddy Krueger, and the movie was *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. More sinister and considered than previous slasher movie villains, Freddy played on a new vulnerability by murdering



his victims at their most helpless, in their dreams.

Basing the action in the supernatural realm, whilst including graphic violence along the way, made Freddy Krueger the perfect candidate for a diverse and creative franchise. Craven's original concept cast Krueger as a child molester, a particularly unsettling twist on previous slasher icons' propensity to target teens who had had premarital sex, although this was toned down for fear of appearing sensationalist. It was not until a 2010 reboot that the idea was brought back in.

The *Nightmare on Elm Street* series was an example of the many horror franchises which turned in on themselves and became parodies; unable to repeat the successful structure of their original instalments, they grew increasingly self-referential and made their horrific stars figures of fun, in the process losing the sense of genuine horror that had made them such a hit. In a similar way, *Child's Play* (1988) jangled nerves around the world with the introduction of possessed doll Chucky, but its sequels added a family dynamic and elements of humour with varying degrees of success.

As with any cinematic trend, the traditional slasher movie did not have an indefinite lifespan. Later movies such as *Scream* (1996) served to satirise the clichés of the genre, featuring characters who understood the structure of the movie they were appearing in. Inherently limited in its scope, this approach could not be applied to the genre as a whole; the age of the stalking slasher stumbled to its close as audience tastes changed, to be replaced with... what next?

#### IMAGE CAPTIONS

**Above, left:** There's nowhere to hide from Michael Myers (Nick Castle) in *Halloween* (Compass 1978). **Above, right:** Father Merrin (Max von Sydow) approaches the MacNeil home in this iconic image from *The Exorcist* (Warner Brothers 1973).



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